

In my limited experience of the species, based on these observations, the bird seems particularly mobile for an *Otus* and rather unresponsive to playback. It is perhaps likely that we only had a dramatic response once we had reached the core of the territory. The birds were recorded as perching from 3–15 m (heard) from the ground and preferred to perch in thick cover. This latter point is in marked contrast to *Otus rutilus* of Madagascar which is so conspicuous by night, often perching in the open to call and hunt.

As detailed by Safford, the Badanga seems to be restricted to patches of primary montane forest on steep slopes. It seems unlikely that the population could exceed 100 pairs and may be much lower. Cultivation in some form is practised on increasingly

steep slopes and given the burgeoning population on the island there seems to be little hope for this bird in the long term, unless some form of protected area can be established.

Whatever the outlook for the species, owl fanatics will surely be drawn to the mountains of Anjouan to take up the challenge presented by this elusive bird. ☺

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Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* in the Banc d'Arguin National Park, Mauritania: a new species for Africa

Robert S.R. Williams^a and Martin C. Jacoby^b

The Banc d'Arguin National Park on the Mauritanian coast holds one of the largest concentrations of wintering waders in the world. The area is both relatively difficult to visit and unmonitored.

During a visit to the park from 6–10 January 1994 we observed a first winter Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*. It was found on the morning of the 7 January feeding with several hundred mixed calidrid sandpipers on the north side of the Iwik peninsula. The flock mainly comprised Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Little Stints *C. minuta* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* with smaller numbers of other waders.

After approximately 40 minutes a small wader, the size of a Little Stint, but heavier billed, marginally larger and plumper than the surrounding Little Stints with a short primary projection, was noticed. It also appeared slightly duller than most of the stints. Almost immediately the bird flew but it returned and landed less than ten metres away beside some roosting Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres*. This allowed exceptional views in good light conditions, as it roosted.

The bird remained for about 20 minutes permitting a comprehensive description to be taken (summarised below) before it flew off when the flock was disturbed by a Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*. It was not seen again but the chances of relocating it amongst the thousands of waders was virtually nil.

Description

Structure

Appeared slightly larger and dumpier than the nearby Little Stints, but did not appear long legged as does Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*. Showed a shorter primary projection than surrounding Little Stints.

Bare parts

Bill: black, heavier than Little Stint being broader based and thicker and possibly slightly longer (being about twice the loral distance) bulbous tipped giving a very slightly decurved effect. The bill was not as long or decurved as Western Sandpiper.

Legs: black, distinct palmaria between middle and outer toes visible at close range, whilst sleeping.

Plumage

Head: grey crown with black streaking and grey ear coverts with darker smudgy lores. Noticeable white supercilium being broader in front of the eye.

Underparts: white with some faint streaking at the sides of the breast, this was confined to the sides and did not extend across the front of the breast.

Mantle: uniform pale grey with dark shaft streaks.

Wing coverts: pale grey with dark shaft streaks. A couple of very worn feathers retained from juvenile plumage showed pale edges and darker centres.

Tertials: grey with paler fringes.

Flight feathers: blackish.

Rump and tail: rump black centre with white sides and a black tail.

The call was not heard clearly owing to many other waders calling at the same time and the strong wind.

The palming between the toes immediately eliminates the Old World stints and reduces the identification to either Semipalmated or Western Sandpiper. The combination of the bird's structure, bill length and shape, and the streaking on the breast being restricted to the sides, lead to Western Sandpiper's elimination.

Discussion

This constitutes the first record of Semipalmated Sandpiper for mainland Africa, although its occurrence is not unexpected. There are at least 70 records from Europe, including over 60 from Britain where it is now annual³. There are also about ten records from the Azores³.

Several other Nearctic waders have also been recorded from the west coast of Africa², including Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* from Mauritania¹. There are also records of Nearctic waders including Semipalmated Sandpiper from Eilat, Israel⁴. The distribution of these records is a reflection of

birdwatching activity. With the largest concentration of wintering shorebirds on earth the Banc d'Arguin National Park will surely hold vagrant waders on a regular basis - they just need to be found!

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¹*School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK.*

²*Finca la Borreaga, San Pablo de Buccieta, 11320 Cadiz, Spain.*

Announcement

Raptor Conservation Group

First announcement of V World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls

4 August to 11 August 1998 in Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Hosted by The Raptor Conservation Group and Vulture Study Group of The Endangered Wildlife Trust

For more information please fax:

Mr Robin Chancellor,
Hon Secretary of the World Working
Group on Birds of Prey and Owls,
15b Bolton Gardens,
London SW5 0AL, UK;
Fax: +44-171-370-1896

or

Dr Bernd-U Meyburg,
President of the World Working Group
on Birds of Prey and Owls,
Wangenheimstrasse 32,
14193 Berlin, Germany;
Fax: +30-892-8067

or

Dr Gerhard H Verdoorn,
Chairman of the Raptor Conservation
Group, PO Box 72155,
Parkview 2122, Johannesburg,
South Africa;
Fax: +27-11-646-4631